

WHY AFRICAN PHILOSOPHERS SHOULD BUILD SYSTEMS: AN EXERCISE IN CONVERSATIONAL THINKING

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Abstract

At the height of the Great Debate about the existence or otherwise of African philosophy, Kwasi Wiredu bemoaned the dearth of originality in the practice of African philosophy. For him, African philosophers should now go beyond talking about African philosophy and get down to actually doing it. But what does it mean to do African philosophy? And what is the importance of actually doing African philosophy? In this paper, I will argue that doing African philosophy should involve, among other things, system-building. I will argue that the growth of the discipline and the advancement of Africa's intellectual history constitute strong reasons for African philosophers to aim at building systems in this era. I will highlight existing attempts at system-building in African philosophy and show their weaknesses in order to project conversational thinking as a better framework. I will conclude by arguing that system-building is part of the overall goal of conversational philosophy, which has been demonstrated in some quarters as the future direction of African philosophy.

Keywords: African philosophy, system-building, conversational thinking, conversational philosophy

Introduction

System-building primarily involves creating concepts and framing theories and formulating principles. In different fields, scholars attempt to study and understand the world around them. To do this, they require certain conceptual and/or theoretical frameworks. These frameworks enable the researcher to look into a given phenomenon they have taken up for their study. In fact, it can be argued that both framing of concepts and theories lie at the base of system-building in diverse fields. The case is not different in philosophy. Here, I will be concerned with the fate of African philosophy. To what extent has the framing of concepts and theories been part of the African philosophy in practice? To what extent have they been missing? Is system-building strategically important to the future development of African philosophy? And what is the

connection between system-building and the commitments of conversational tradition of African philosophy? These questions shall drive my inquiries in this paper.

The premise of my argument is centred on the need for system-building in African philosophy today. As a distinct philosophical tradition, one expects to see the labyrinth of thought or the tributary which reason is carving in the African place and which accounts for African philosophy's contributions to philosophy in general, and intellectual history of the world. I am of the view that system-building is one of the hallmarks of any philosophical tradition which on the whole, marks its difference from other traditions. It is not in doubt that philosophical traditions, in their different cultural areas, may engage with similar problems but it is their approaches to these problems that may set them apart from one another. These varied approaches are accounted for by several factors, including nature, structure, meaning and choices of concepts they each create and work with. These concepts are in turn, the binding glues of theories. Put together, they represent the lens for viewing reality. It is therefore understandable that these lens, which can be equated to systems, should vary from one philosophy tradition to another.

It can however be contested, and I can attribute this mindset to the universalist school of African philosophy, that conceptual and theoretical frameworks need not and probably should not vary before we can talk of African philosophy as a tradition in world philosophy. Prominent universalists like Paulin Hountondji and Peter Bodunrin have attacked ideas of distinction like the one I propose in this work as courting isolation. For Hountondji (1996), we may be unwittingly playing into the hands of the Eurocentric iconoclasts who taunt Africans as pre-logical since they supposedly possess an inferior sub-set of mental faculties different from what the rest of human kind possess. But this may not hold firm since I do not subscribe to the idea of African philosophy that is culture-bound nor do I conceive reason—the basic tool of philosophy—as multiple. My contention is simple, and this is consistent with the universal idea of philosophy, that African philosophy is the application of reason in the African place. That application of reason is not geared towards identifying 'African falsehoods' and yielding 'African truths', this would be outlandish and misguided; rather, it is geared towards identifying and attempting to solve problems from the African place. This is why Bruce Janz (2009) is of the view that the proper place to ask the questions of philosophy is in a particular place.

From the foregoing, I will argue that system-building is a characteristic feature of any philosophical tradition and that African

philosophy should not be different. I will show that since the era of what Jonathan Chimakonam (2014) calls systematic African philosophy, which dates back to the beginning of the 20th century, i.e. the literate and systematic study of African philosophy, system-building has largely been missing in the practice of African philosophy. I will briefly highlight existing attempts to building systems by contemporary African philosophers like C. S. Momoh, Pantaleon Iroegbu, Innocent Asouzu and Ada Agada and show their limitations. To discuss a new perspective, I will draw a correlation between the need for system-building and the project of conversational thinking as the future direction of African philosophy.

What is the State of African Philosophy Today?

To discuss why African philosophers should build systems, it may be helpful to first understand what the current state of African philosophy is. Once we have a fair idea of where we are coming from and where we are today, with regards to the accomplishments in the historical development of the discipline, we would be able to discern exactly what step is next in line in relation to the urgent needs in the field. It is not out of place to state that the major turning point in the historical development of African philosophy did not occur until the Great Debate.

One good thing about the Great Debate was that it tried to redirect the development of African philosophy to the proper course. I use the word ‘proper’ to capture the effect of the ethnophilosophical enterprise which had grown in prominence with the rise in political nationalisms across Africa. Again, for the high Afrocentric sentiment of the time (which was forcing the discipline to derail), it was imperative to adjust discussions in the field to a higher level of rigour. During the reign of ethnophilosophy, sentiment was chosen in place of rigour; proving a point was preferred to truth; fragmentation in the particular was considered ahead of discovery in the universal. Indeed, what was emerging as African philosophy was actually ethnophilosophy until the universalists or the modernists which included the likes of Paulin Hountondji, Odera Oruka, Kwasi Wiredu, Peter Bodunrin, to name just the pioneers, challenged and stopped the tide of ethnological thinking in the history of African philosophy. They argued and quite correctly that any philosophy worth its name must fulfil certain requirements some of which include; in style, rigour; in method, analyticity; in approach, systematicity and individual insight which may be critical or creative.

However, another problem arose as a result of the long clash between the modernists and the traditionalists. Due to the protracted nature of the debate, actors on both sides began to indulge in what is described as “perverse dialogue” instead of actual philosophising

(VEST 2009, 1-23; CHIMAKONAM 2015a, xiii). This perverse dialogue which was about arguments and counter-arguments concerning who was racist or non-rigorous; who was qualified to be called an African philosopher or not; who was doing and who was not doing African philosophy, etc.; despite being necessary to the development of African philosophy as we understand it today, mitigated on system-building. Following Chimakonam's position, one can observe that the growth of African philosophy almost stalled during the protracted debate. More than three decades passed, during which actors were engaged in this perverse dialogue, before a period of disillusionment set in, as Chimakonam reported (2015b, 24). During this historical moment between the early and the late 1980s, actors began to question the wisdom of the long debate. Philosophers like Wiredu, who saw no merit in the lingering debate about the status of African philosophy, admonished their contemporaries that it was time they stopped talking and began doing African philosophy proper (1980, xi). How to proceed was however, a big challenge. Lucius Outlaw recommended a two-stage process of deconstruction and then reconstruction (1987, 9-44). Indeed, different people thought of different strategies, some of which implied building systems. To this end, we must appreciate the early efforts of Henry Oruka, Campbell Momoh, Pantaleon Iroegbu and Innocent Asouzu. But a question has since arisen concerning the criteria of African philosophy. In other words, what precisely makes a discourse African philosophy? As an answer to this question, Chimakonam (2015c; 2015d), discussed the various contributions to the criteria question which included the views from Hountondji, Onyewuenyi, Oruka, Wiredu, Oluwole, Nwala and Uduma and rejected them all before proposing his logic-based criterion on which he formulated his framework of conversational thinking. I will discuss this framework in the next section and employ it later on to advance a case for system-building.

On the whole, if African philosophy is to grow, then it has to raise questions in the African place and attend to the circumstances that birthed those questions. It is in so doing that one can say that African philosophy fulfils its duties to itself. Raising questions involves serious critical efforts; attempts to answer the questions involves both rigour and argumentation and of course, hermeneutics. Eventually, the process culminates at a level where systems are required. It is at this creative level that concepts are produced, principles formulated and theories created. This type of creative endeavour is long overdue in the field of African philosophy. A few efforts are being made already in the aftermath of the post-debate era and we owe a debt of gratitude, as I said earlier, to the likes of Campbell Momoh who gifted us with the

Theory of Many-many Truths (1991); Pantaleon Iroegbu who created the theory of Uwa ontology (1995) and Innocent Asouzu who created the theory of complementary reflection or Ibuanyidanda ontology (2004). Recently, Jonathan Chimakonam and Ada Agada have followed in their footsteps and created the theories of Conversational Philosophy (2015b) and Consolationism (2015) respectively, but these few efforts are not enough. Thus we can see that the current state of African philosophy today begs for a new beginning, a creative era in which system-building is poised to displace perverse dialogue.

As recently as October 12-14 2017, at the 2nd African Philosophy World Conference hosted at the University of Calabar, Nigeria, African philosophers gathered from all corners of the world to discuss the Theme: “The State of African Philosophy in Africa Today”. One issue that this theme draws attention to is the specific concern about what has become of African philosophy within the geography called Africa. One recalls that in the decades following the Great Debate, African philosophy began to feature in the curricula of some universities in Europe and North America. However, in many places, it was taught as part of African studies or culture. In other places, it was presented as a philosophy which does not yet have proper standing. This is because; a proper critical and creative intellectual culture which motivates the production of concepts and original ideas was not yet in place. In short, framing of concepts and creation of theories were not part of the African philosophical enterprise before the debate and were largely missing during and immediately after the debate. Yet, for there to be progress in African thought, these ingredients are essential and strategic.

Questions have also been raised concerning the methodology of African philosophy by some philosophers like Osuagwu (1999), Anyanwu (2000), Agada (2015) and Chimakonam (2017a and 2017b). Others like Heinz Kimmerle, Jürgen Hengelbrock and Ozumba have drawn attention to the problem of transliterating or copying Western philosophical canon and presenting same as African philosophy (KIMMERLE, Web; HENGELBROCK, Web; OZUMBA 2015). These worries may be considered trivial by those that are upbeat about affirming the existence of African philosophy but they are by no means so. If we are to make reasonable progress in developing the discipline, a few things are inevitable. One of such things is system-building. Thus, what the specific focus on the geography of Africa at the Calabar conference entails is a conscious bracketing off of the territories that lie outside Africa. The ultimate question is: for what reason? One can easily guess - charity begins at home! If the canon of African philosophy is still being questioned in the rest of the world, what is the state of African philosophy in Africa? The organisers of the Calabar

conference probably understood the imperative to put the house of African philosophy in order and that this would be better done within Africa itself. In a recent essay, Edwin Etieyibo and Jonathan Chimakonam (2016, 1-7) inquired into the past, present and future of African philosophy. In another follow-up essay, they inquired into the current state of African philosophy in Africa (2018). These inquiries were motivated by the same need to cultivate a culture that promotes system-building. In the past we debated; what has that debate yielded, how has it influenced the present and what does it portend for the future of the discipline? No one is clear on these concerns and the current state of African philosophy suggests that the discipline is stalling without system-building. If after all the bickering in the debate era, African philosophy is still perceived as somewhat technically deficient in parts of the world, then it calls for serious concern among its practitioners.

On the one hand, we can simply choose to ignore the opposition which emanates chiefly from the West and dismiss it as some do as a projection of iconoclasm or Eurocentricism or outright intellectual racism, or on the other hand, we can choose to look inwards and ascertain whether there are some problems that deserve our attention. I believe that the Calabar conference was called in lieu of the second option. The outcome of that conference is yet to be published but I want to offer my opinion in this work, nonetheless. There is no other problem with the state of African philosophy in Africa today that is more worrisome than the need to build systems. What the discipline needs is system-building. Both Asouzu's accusation of copycat philosophising (2007, 27-35) and Hengelbroch's accusation of Africans of transliterating Western thought (See. <http://www.galerie-inter.de/kimmerle/ceheng.htm>) can effectively be neutralised with the strategy of system-building. The progress in world history and thought are generally accounted for by the movement of ideas. But ideas do not move themselves; they are created and arranged by humans. It is necessary to arrange ideas and put them into perspectives, first, according to fields, then according to topics and contexts. To understand ideas, their values and problems and to put them to use in any field, requires a sort of structure one may call 'system'. Hence, to build systems in a field implies to raise structures that can sort the ideas into several compartments or better still, mechanisms. This organisation that arranges ideas into mechanisms is what we roughly describe as a system. In this shape, ideas embedded in systems become veritable tools for solving some of the problems that plague humanity.

Inside a system, we have elementary principles that make up theories. Above theories, we have laws and these laws proceed from logic—that science of correct reasoning. To engage in reasoning which

spins out ideas, one needs (at least) the faculty of reason. But possessing this faculty, believed by some scholars to be an exclusive preserve of homo sapiens, is not a guarantee that the possessor must use it in ways that imply reasoning. Immanuel Kant must have noted this fact when he proclaimed the motto of the Enlightenment as *Sapere Aude* which means, having the courage to use your own reason (Kant, 1991 2nd. Edn). What is suggested here is that merely possessing the faculty of reason is not enough; one must endeavour to put it to use. In the modern time, the triumph of reason over faith, and science over supernaturalism was completed. When we want to solve problems or analyse situations, we look for rules, principles, theories or laws to appeal to. To do otherwise or simply neglect this procedure is obviously at odds with what currently obtains – postmodernism aside. It is this procedure, housing these rules, principles, theories and laws which are capable of being pieced together in harmony, that we call a system. Ideas are permanent features of systems and we cannot afford to trifle with systems in this modern era. The growth of human civilisation, or strictly, progress in thought in our time is accounted for by this structure or the incremental growth of systems. Building systems, therefore, is necessary for progress in human thought in whatever field, and African philosophy is not an exception.

In the next section, I will show that the methodological ambience of conversational thinking provides a suitable framework for practitioners to begin to build new systems. African philosophy in its present state is still dominated by forms of perverse dialogue which should not be the case. Janz clearly explains that there comes a time when everyone that needs to be persuaded has been persuaded (2009). What actors should do now is to invest more intellectual energy in building systems in African philosophy following the examples already set by the likes of Campbell Momoh, Pantaleon Iroegbu and Innocent Asouzu.

The need for System-Building: An Exercise in Conversational Philosophy

Building systems is like erecting a structure. First, you need a foundation and then you look for several relevant pieces to erect a structure on top of that foundation. In thought, the foundation would be a framework that defines an intellectual worldview while the system would be the concepts, ideas and thoughts glued together, brick by brick with the cement of principles and laws. I argue in this work that there is a need to re-channel efforts in African philosophy towards system-building and there may be different ways of doing this. Whichever way one chooses to pursue this goal, whether through framing new concepts,

making theoretical contributions or providing critical insight, a methodological framework is a prerequisite. In other words, a framework is needed on which to ground ideas in the discipline. It is this framework that will define such ideas as discourses on African philosophy. We do not just build systems of specific tradition of philosophy in the air or simply drag them in a parasitic fashion off another tradition of philosophy. A level of reductionism is required. For example, if we say that theory 'A' is a system in African philosophy, there must be something that we can identify that makes it so, and this thing, I argue, is a methodological overcoat called "framework for thought." The reason for this is not far-fetched. Framework for thought is important, if not central in marking out provenances for philosophy. It is what points to the direction and pattern of thinking which is something that defines a people's worldview. We say people 'P' think in this manner and people 'Q' think in this other manner about the same reality and identify their modes of understanding as things that characterise them. When these cultural nuances are mechanised into methods, they characterise the type of intellectual systems that can be produced and found in such places. And I should add that what is significant in all of this is not which is superior or inferior, but the sustenance of humanity's beautiful diversity. Various systems in Western philosophy are grounded in the methodological frameworks articulated in Western thought. For example, the linguistic systems formulated by the likes of Wittgenstein, Rorty, Quine, etc., are grounded in the method of logical analysis. Thus, talk of system-building in African philosophy requires a framework for thought which one can say has provenance in African thought. It is not enough to toy with one theory or the other in African philosophy as the likes of Momoh (1991), Iroegbu (1995), Asouzu (2004) and Agada (2015) have done with their respective theories, it is also important to identify the method on which such theories are grounded.

In recent times, Chimakonam has formulated a framework for thought he calls conversational thinking (2015b, 2015e, 2015f, 2017a) which, riding on the crest of 'relationship' or 'mutual communion' of opposites, I think has the technical capacity to ground the theories of Momoh, Iroegbu, Asouzu, Agada and many others as the case may be. In other words, it is easy to technically reduce these theories to conversational thinking as a framework for thought. It may be claimed that conversational thinking defines the criteria which a theory has to meet in order to qualify as African philosophy. There is no other such framework in the literature of African philosophy to the best of my knowledge. What are available like the examples of Oruka's philosophic sagacity, Momoh's many-many-truths, Wiredu's conceptual

decolonisation, Iroegbu's uwa ontology, Asouzu's ibuanya ontology, Metz' relational ethics, Agada's consolation philosophy, and various shades of ubuntu and communitarian thoughts springing up nowadays, etc., can all be said to be rigorous statements of conversational thinking. The creators of these other theories simply say that they are discourses in African philosophy without telling anybody why they are so and without pointing at any definable framework such theories derive from or could be reduced to that makes such theories ideas in African philosophy. At best, actors simply say that their thoughts are theories in African philosophy because their creators are Africans working in Africa on Africa-related topics. But these are hardly satisfactory because; ideas in sociology or anthropology or even history can easily meet these criteria. Methodologically, while Asouzu says his theory is grounded in his method of complementary reflection; Oruka, Momoh, Iroegbu and Metz ground their own in the communitarian method; others like Wiredu and Agada ground their theories in what seem like the Western analytic and continental methods.

Tragically, there is nothing in these methods that pre-define them as African. Granted that someone like Agada (2015), thinks that methods of Western philosophy suffice for African philosophy, others like Osuagwu (1999) and Chimakonam (2017a and 2017b) insist that method is what shapes each philosophy tradition. I am persuaded to agree with Osuagwu and Chimakonam because; if we do African philosophy using methods of Western philosophy, what then makes African philosophy different from Western philosophy? I accept that the concern of different philosophical traditions can be the same, after all, we are all human beings irrespective of geography, and our problems are almost always the same but, I insist that the methods ought not to be the same. We say that A and B for example, are different philosophical traditions because; they have developed different ways of looking at reality or solving their problems. These different ways are procedures or methods that characterise these different traditions of philosophy. Methods simply must show difference if not in substance then at least in degree.

Of the methods which the various authors of theories in African philosophy adopt for their ideas, none to my knowledge clearly demonstrates the African 'difference'. Asouzu's complementary reflection, the only method in which one can easily identify sparks of originality has existed in Western scholarship long before African philosophy was born. The three-valued programme of Jan Lukasiewicz (1920) was a logical demonstration of the idea of complementarity which Hans Reichenbach (1944) affirmed was already in application in various fields include quantum physics. The communitarian idea also

has long been around in Western scholarship with Aristotle's *Politics* that declared man a political animal carving a path that connected well with early Christian and socialist ideologies and which finally blossomed in the 20th century in the works of scholars like Amitai Etzioni, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, Alasdair MacIntyre, Seyla Benhabib, and Shlomo Avineri, etc. It is easy for some African philosophers to claim that we had this idea in our worldview long ago or that it is strictly African, it would still not be enough. It is even immaterial to the present context for anyone to claim that one worldview copied from the other. The point remains that the idea of communitarianism is present in both African and Western worldviews and as such; it would be ridiculous to suggest that grounding theories in the communitarian method is sufficient to make them African philosophy. It does not also matter whether one calls it Afro, African or whatever type of communitarianism.

The above scenario simply shows how urgent the methodological question is in African philosophy and I see Chimakonam's conversational thinking with its trademark arumaristic technique as responding creditably to this need. According to him (2017a), arumaristics is a technique of philosophising in which conjunctive and disjunctive motions define the relationships of seemingly opposed variables (nwa-nju and nwa-nsa), first, towards a complementation without the possibility of synthesis and which breaks off at a point known as 'the benoke point' due to the tension of incommensurables to activate a disjunctive motion. Second, towards a disengagement without the possibility of continuous disagreement which again breaks off at a point known as 'concessional bridge' to pave way for a conjunctive motion yet again. In arumaristics, there is sustained engagement which Chimakonam describes as 'creative continuum' (2017b), something that clearly explains regression and progression in thought; and it is a framework that is clearly original. Above all else, there is communitarian, complementary and incisive rigour in it, which makes it possible to ground most extant theories in African philosophy in it. And this is what makes conversational thinking unique and attractive.

Discourses do not just become ideas in African philosophy, simply because their authors say so or are Africans working on topics that concern Africa. This was an over-simplistic opinion Hountondji (1996) promoted without success at some point in the history of African philosophy. Again, thanks to Chimakonam (2015a) who successfully discredited Hountondji's idea that a discourse is African philosophy if it is written by an African who describes it as such. This Hountondji's position has three dangerous consequences as Chimakonam (2015a and

2015c) pointed out: (a) it suggests that only an African could author African philosophy (b) an author of an idea can arbitrarily determine by his whim alone whether such an idea is African philosophy or something else that pleases him (c) by 'a', Hountondji makes mockery of his campaign that philosophy is universal in that he could do Western philosophy but non-Africans cannot do African philosophy. It is the contradiction in 'c' that Chimakonam aptly describes as "Hountondji's Dilemma" (2015a, xiii). My hunch is not to discredit the various theories propounded by African philosophers as mentioned above, but to give them methodological grounding by reducing them to a common framework which will not only give them similar outlook as kindred ideas but will mark ideas of such nature as elements of the African philosophy tradition. As controversial as this reduction might seem, I think it is necessary in order to carve the territory of African philosophy.

Thus, without the framework of conversational thinking, there may not be a clear way of stating that theory Y is a discourse in African philosophy and theory Z is not. It is with this framework of conversational thinking that I am concerned in this work and my argument is that (1) system-building did not flourish during the debate and in the post debate era due to lack of a veritable framework on which actors could ground their ideas and, (2) those that were created eventually were grounded in frameworks that are either Western or did not clearly show their Africanness (3) the conversational technique now offers such a framework on which existing old systems can be grounded and new ones can be built in African philosophy. I will describe the structure of conversational thinking as a framework for thought later in this section.

I reckon that the conversational framework portends greater utility for African philosophy in transition. I argue that as a foundational structure, it purveys a mechanism which African philosophers can spring from to formulate their principles, create their theories and promulgate laws even. To be specific, conversational thinking proposes some elementary criteria which when fulfilled, would enable one to formulate principles and create theories that can effectively be described as African. First is the logical criterion. By this criterion Chimakonam explains that a truly African idea has to reflect three pronged valuations. In other words, variables can be evaluated as true, false and complemented. By the third intermediate value, contradictions are transformed into sub-contraries (CHIMAKONAM, 2015c). This is in keeping with a version of three-valued logic model he calls Ezumezu which according to him undergirds the framework of conversational thinking (CHIMAKONAM, 2017c and 2018a). The second is the ontological criterion and by this criterion, Chimakonam explains that

reality in African thought can be conceived in terms of units or variables, some of which are opposed but mutually interdependent. These two criteria derive from what Chimakonam calls the logical and the ontological theses respectively (2017a) which for lack of space, I will not delve into here. Put together, theories in African philosophy and in the broad field of African studies for that matter necessarily have to reflect this background logic and ontological model. It is important to note that I am not treating this proposal as absolute; Chimakonam's idea is just one possible proposal, but one that is better than what we currently have. The weakness of frameworks like communitarianism and complementarity is that they cannot claim to be African in origin or even exclusively African as I have clarified earlier whereas, despite the elements conversational thinking shares with other existing models, no one can doubt its originality. It is original frameworks like this that African philosophers are here tasked to formulate and until we have a better one, conversational thinking is here recommended. As the discipline of African studies grows, it is possible that we may have some other proposals. But until then, I see no problem in encouraging the adoption of the one we have at the moment. It is also possible that through criticisms, this proposal may be improved upon or a better alternative may be found.

But in the mean time, I recommend the adoption of Chimakonam's conversational technique by African thinkers who seek to formulate principles and create theories in African philosophy specifically and African studies generally. This project of system-building is very important if we must scale through, on the one hand, the hurdle of Eurocentricism which seeks to dilute African thought into the universal and on the other hand, the hurdle of Afrocentricism which seeks to fragment and isolate it in the particular. Aime Cesaire in "Letter to Maurice Thorez" was quite apt: "There are two ways to lose oneself: walled segregation in the particular or dilution in the universal" (2010, 152). What this points to is the urgent need to give African thought a solid base. We cannot claim to be doing African philosophy whereas its methodic ambience is Western. Yet, as much as we recognise the importance of avoiding dilution in the universal in our attempt to cultivate a separate methodic base for African philosophy, such attempts must not translate into isolation from the other. This is one good reason to recommend the conversational framework which among others is inspired by African thought and yet has universal applicability. The principles of its operation recognise diversity and the complementation of difference without the expectation of synthesis.

To be specific, conversational thinking is piloted by two types of epistemic agents namely; nwa-nsa (the proponent) and nwa-nju (the

opponent), whose duties are to inspire and sustain what Chimakonam calls “creative struggle” which leads to the production of new concepts, principles and theories that yield new systems (2017a, 17-18). The brilliant thing about this framework is that it appears dialectical in the mode of Hegelian dialectic but it is not completely so. Its structure is described by Chimakonam, as I explained earlier. as arumaristics (2017a and 2018b). This is because, as Chimakonam explains it, nwa-nsa and nwa-nju cannot necessarily be equated with thesis and anti-thesis in Hegelian terms. To understand why, one needs to know that in Chimakonam’s structure, the interaction between nwa-nsa and nwa-nju follows predetermined motions namely; disjunctive and conjunctive motions (2017a, 19). While disjunctive motion widens the gap to create disengagement or disagreement between them, conjunctive motion bridges it to create complementation. Again, this is necessitated by what Chimakonam calls “ontological variance” and “ontological equality” respectively (2017a, 21). While ontological variance refers to those existential properties that make two entities different, ontological equality refers to those existential properties that make two entities similar. What Chimakonam tries to explain with these concepts is that the different existential properties set entities apart and the similar ones pull them together. So, the propensity of mutual interaction or otherwise is determined at each point by the sum of what entities share in common and what makes them different. In other words, when differences are highlighted, variables or epistemic agents enter a disjunctive motion moving away from each other, thus widening the gap between them and reducing interaction, and when similarities are highlighted, variables or epistemic agents enter a conjunctive motion moving closer to each other thus bridging the gap between them and enhancing interaction.

However, and this is where Chimakonam’s framework differs from Hegel’s dialectic structure, variables or epistemic agents in conversational relationship do not enjoy synthetic interpenetration, unlike Hegelian dialectic relationship which is a structure that approves union of opposite variables. Chimakonam’s brilliant strategy was to undercut the synthetic aspect of the dialectic structure with a stroke of genius captured in what he calls the principles of “benoke point” and “tension of incommensurables” (2017a, 19-20). Without these two, conversational relationship can fairly be reduced to Hegelian dialectical relationship, all things being equal. According to Chimakonam, benoke point is that point in the interaction process beyond which variables cannot get closer and this is occasioned by their ontological variance.

His ontological thesis stipulates that realities, including the identical and the opposed ones exist in a network of interconnection,

interrelation and interdependence (2017a, 18). This implies that mutual interaction, even of opposed variables is basic in reality but the extent of this interaction is where conversational framework is circumspect. Unlike in Hegelian structure, the conversational framework observes certain limitations for example, two opposed variables cannot achieve mutual interpenetration leading to the dilution of the individual in the whole. The benoke point stands in the way of the Hegelian-style synthesis. In fact, any attempt by opposed variables or epistemic agents to cross the benoke point inevitably generates a ripple effect called tension of incommensurables which is an oppositional disharmony that shows when a complementary relationship has collapsed. So, to be plain, there is no oppositional synthesis in a conversational relationship, only a complementary relationship between opposites. What this means is that the possibility of a synthetic harmony or dilution of opposition is absent in a conversational structure.

Additionally, conversational thinking has also been shown to be intercultural (CHIMAKONAM 2017a, 11-12). My conviction about its viability rests on the fact that conversationalism is intercultural and intercultural philosophy as some have argued seems destined to be the future direction of philosophy irrespective of which tradition one is working in (WIMMER 1996, 45-57; YOUSEFI 2007, 199). It is therefore attractive to adopt the framework that is destined to accelerate the progress of African philosophy and place it at par with other philosophical traditions. I do not wish to stretch the intercultural dimension of my arguments any further because that would amount to a digression. The impression I seriously want to create is that the framework of conversational thinking seems better positioned (1) to propel theories and systems which one can with confidence and accuracy describe as African, and (2) as a result of 1, and with recourse to its intercultural dimension, to herald the African contribution to world intellectual history. As a matter of fact, contributing to world intellectual history alone constitutes a strong reason for system-building in African philosophy.

On the whole, as far as African philosophy and the broad field of African studies are concerned, I am convinced that the conversational framework represents a veritable structure on which new systems can be created and on which new vistas for thought can be opened in the struggling, and for sometimes now, stunted history of African philosophy. A little demonstration may be needful here. Momoh's theory of many-many truth for example, stipulates that truth is relative and tentative; that there are as many truths as there are different peoples and sources of philosophy; and that no philosophy tradition can claim authorship of one objective truth because; such an objective truth is

fictitious or a fiction and does not exist. The goal of philosophy for Momoh therefore is the “minimisation of fiction” by constantly interrogating all claims to truth (1991, 16-17). For Iroegbu’s uwa ontology, reality is made up of units; some similar and some dissimilar that are capable of forming an englobing whole. Each unit is incomplete and requires others to find completeness in the whole (1995). For Asouzu’s *ibuanyidanda* theory, being is fragmented into components each of which is important towards the realisation of collective goal; hence, each is a missing link of reality. By conjunctive motion, different missing links find their fulfilment in mutual complementation (ASOUZU 2004). And for Agada’s consolation philosophy, the burden of philosophy can be reduced to two questions: Is human life futile? And is the universe pointless? Attempt to answer these questions according to him, leads to the realisation that the world is all about mood: that of joy and sadness. These are two seemingly opposed realities that find reconciliation in consolation (AGADA 2015).

From the foregoing, one can easily see the framework of conversational thinking. On the one hand is the ontological thesis that reality is made up of units, both similar and dissimilar. And on the other hand is the logical thesis which states via the principle of Context-Dependence of Value (CdV) that the seemingly opposed realities are nonetheless harmonisable not in a dialectic way but in an *arumaristic* way. It is on the basis of these criteria captured in the conversational framework that one can adjudge these theories to be discourses in African philosophy. Without this grounding, we will be making empty, questionable and confused claims about what is African philosophy and what is not.

Conclusion

The poverty of conceptual accumulations and the dearth of theories in the field of African philosophy point to the lack of a framework for thought to direct theoretic constructions. Since the Great Debate, there appears to be lack of creative spark amongst African thinkers. What we have instead, is the proliferation of perverse dialogues. Actors seemed content on debating and quarrelling over whether African philosophy exists or not and how to alter this direction of thought was a big problem for decades. Even in the late 1970s when actors in the modernist school like Marcién Towa, Richard Wright, Henri Maurier and the enigmatic V. Y. Mudimbe began a campaign of deconstruction in their various styles, the problem was always what would happen after the deconstruction. And indeed, nothing happened because the mound of African philosophy or even ethnophilosophy was still relatively small, such that the idea of deconstruction was fundamentally suspect at that

stage of the discipline. It was not long before the deconstructionists slipped into disillusionment (CHIMAKONAM, 2014), oblivious of what to do next or to which direction to proceed. Outlaw's call for reconstruction somehow provided the fillip that heralded a new era in which system-building emerged as the Holy Grail. To this end, we must show gratitude for the efforts of Oruka, Wiredu, Momoh, Iroegbu and Asouzu. But a question has since arisen concerning the criteria of African philosophy. In other words, what precisely makes a discourse African philosophy? A number of African thinkers offered opinions in this regard as I noted earlier but the submission of Chimakonam backed up with his framework of conversational thinking appears more attractive and I here make a case for its adoption by African thinkers interested in system-building as the framework on which concepts, principles and theories in African philosophy can be developed.

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